

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 05524 151645Z

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2302

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 5524

E.O. 11654: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, AR

SUBJECT: MILITARY COMMUNIQUE ON DAMASCO'S APPOINTMENT

1. FOLLOWING LENGTHY MEETING AUGUST 14 WITH ARMY COMMANDERS, COMMANDING GENERAL LAPLANE RELEASED COMMUNIQUE SETTING FORTH ARMY'S POSITION ON CONTROVERSIAL APPOINTMENT COLONEL DAMASCO AS MININTERIOR. FOUR POINT COMMUNIQUE ACKNOWLEDGED PRESIDENT'S CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO NAME MINISTERS, STATE THAT MILITARY REGULATIONS GOVERNING APPOINTMENT ACTIVE DUTY OFFICER TO CIVILIAN POSITION WOULD BE ADHERED TO, NOTED THAT ARMY REPRESENTATION WITHIN CABINET WOULD BE EXERCISED BY MINDEFENSE OR COMMANDING GENERAL IF CONVOKED FOR THAT PURPOSE, AND REITERATED ARMY'S POSITION THAT ITS ROLE IS TO DEFEND CONSTITUTIONALISM.

2. APPOINTMENT OF DAMASCO CAUSED WIDESPREAD DISCONTENT WITHIN MILITARY AND SPARKED FLOOD OF COUP RUMORS. DIVISION WITHIN ARMY IS HIGHLIGHTED BY FACT THAT, ACCORDING PRESS FIRST VOTE AT AUGUST 14 MEETING ON WHETHER TO DEMAND DAMASCO IMMEDIATE RETIREMENT OR PERMIT HIM TIME ALLOWED UNDER MILITARY REGULATION WAS DEADLOCKED AT FIVE VOTES EACH. GENERALS BETTI, CANEPA, ROSAS, CACERES AND LAPLANE SUPPORTED EXTENSION WHILE DELIA LA ROCA, VIDELA, VIOLA, SUAREZ MASON AND URRICARLET DEMANDED HIS IMMEDIATE RETIREMENT. POSITION FINALLY ADOPTED PERMITS DAMASCO TO REMAIN ON ACTIVE DUTY TWO MONTHS, THEN HE PASSES TO INACTIVE STATUS FOR AN ADDITIONAL FOUR MONTHS, CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BUENOS 05524 151645Z

DURING WHICH TIME HE MUST DECIDE ON EITHER RETIREMENT OR RESIGN-

ING POLITICAL POSITION AND REQUESTING REINSTATEMENT ACTIVE DUTY.

3. EVENING OF AUGUST 14 THE DIRECTOR OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE ON EXPRESS ORDERS FROM ADMIRAL MASSERA TOLD EMBASSY OFFICER THAT NAVY AND AIR FORCE HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED IN ADVANCE OF DAMASCO'S SELECTION TO BE INTERIOR MINISTRE, AND THAT HIS PRESENCE IN CABINET DID NOT IMPLY ANY ARMED FORCES PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT. MASSERA WANTED THIS BROUGHT TO ATTENTION OF AMBASSADOR.

4. COMMENT. COMMUNIQUE RESOLVES IMMEDIATE INTERNAL ARMY CRISIS, BUT DISSENSION WILL CONTINUE. NOTICE THAT DAMASCO DOES NOT REPRESENT ARMY IN CABINET AND THAT ARMY WILL CONTINUE TO DEFEND CONSTITUTIONALISM SHOULD DAMPEN RUMORED INTENTIONS OF SOME MILITARY TO STAGE COUP. ALTHOUGH NAVY AND AIR FORCE MAY NOT BE IN FULL ACCORD WITH DAMASCO'S RETENTION CABINET POSITION, IT IS THE ARMY WHICH HAS THE HORSEPOWER AND WHICH WILL DECIDE ON ROLE OF MILITARY DURING THIS CRISIS PERIOD.
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